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ABSTRACT

Appropriate for high school students, four units focus on the role, problems, and functions of city government. Designed to be covered in 5 to 6 weeks, the units involve students in interviewing city council members, listing community needs, inviting local officials as guest speakers, and examining problems resulting from the structure, limited authority, and routine operations of local government. Discussions focus on physical and fiscal community planning and the need for long-range planning. Active research includes examination of committee meeting minutes and official records. Each unit lists general concepts, objectives, activities, resources, and recommended evaluation procedures. (KC)

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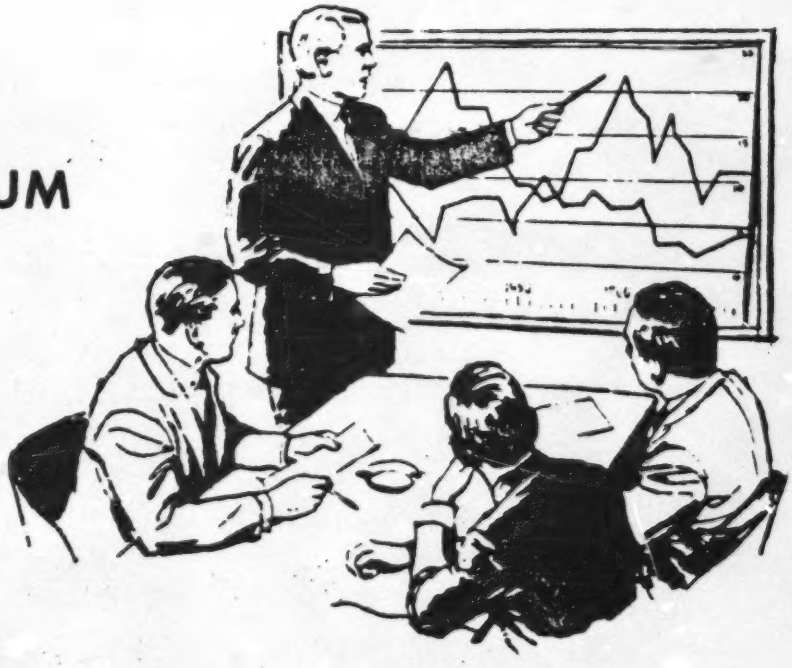
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A CURRICULUM GUIDE



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Institute for Political/Legal Education

On behalf of the Department of Education, State of New Jersey, I wish to bring the Institute for Political and Legal Education to the attention of educators throughout the nation. The program has made a significant contribution to the education of high school students about the American political, governmental, and legal processes and thus should be of interest to educators, parents, and students.

Fred G. Burke

Dr. Fred G. Burke
Commissioner of Education
State of New Jersey

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The Institute for Political and Legal Education was developed through the cooperative efforts of the Institute staff, educators in local New Jersey districts, and the staff of the Office of Program Development, Division of Research, Planning, and Evaluation/Field Services, the Department of Education, State of New Jersey. The political and legal materials were developed between 1971 and 1974 with funding from Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title III.

In 1974, the political education program was validated as successful, cost-effective, and exportable by the standards and guidelines of the United States Office of Education. As a result the program is now funded through ESEA, Title III as a demonstration site to provide dissemination materials and services to interested educators.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT CURRICULUM GUIDE

The term "policy-making" calls to mind the major decisions made in Washington or the various state capitals. Yet, questions of policy—the need to choose among alternative courses of action—occur at all levels of government. Local communities are faced with problems of planning, zoning, personnel management, and many other matters. Local government decision-making has a direct impact on the everyday life of the citizen: e.g., the size of his back yard, the books his children are assigned to read in school, the safety of the local streets, the size of the tax bill, the sanitary conditions of the restaurants in which he eats, and so on.

The following pages provide the teacher with a complete curriculum guide on teaching about local government, focusing upon four basic unit concepts:

1. Understanding the general role of local government.

2. Understanding the different types of problems faced by local governments.

3. Understanding community planning and the incorporation of long-range goals.

4. Understanding the functioning of your own local government.

Within each unit of study are carefully delineated objectives, suggested activities, resources, and evaluation procedures. The emphasis, as can readily be seen, is on using the local community for the classroom—bringing professional resource people into the school, and getting the students out into the town or city to investigate the topics under consideration. If the teacher wishes to cover the subject of local government in depth, there are sufficient activity suggestions for 5-6 weeks of useful classroom and out-of-school time.

UNIT ONE

GENERAL CONCEPT:

Understanding the general role of local government.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to list the needs of the community which are fulfilled by local government.

2. Students will be able to identify the methods by which local government fulfills the needs of the community.

3. Students will be able to compare and contrast the different views of municipal officials concerning the role of local government.

ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Objective One

1. *Activity*—Class discussion. Teacher lists, upon asking students for suggestions, all possible needs of community which might be fulfilled by local government.

   Recommended Resources—Some needs of local community: police and fire protection, transportation and regulation of traffic, zoning codes to prohibit undesired types of construction.

2. *Activity*—Students poll civic community leaders and interview City Council for their opinions on the needs of the community which are fulfilled by local government.

   Recommended Resources—Assign several students to contact ten community civic leaders (e.g., Jaycees, Kiwanis) and ask them to list briefly the needs of the community they see fulfilled by the local government. Then assign several additional students to poll three City Council persons or municipal employees to list the needs of the community they see fulfilled by local government. *Note*: Teachers should send letter to civic clubs in advance to inform them of project.

   Students then report findings to entire class and total list of identified community needs is recorded for further reference.

Objective Two

1. *Activity*—Class discussion. Teacher refers to lists of community needs compiled by students polling community civic leaders and municipal officials. Students then identify the method by which these needs are fulfilled by local government.

   Recommended Resources—Some methods by which community needs are fulfilled by local government include: the operation of municipal agencies (police department, department of health), enactment of laws and zoning codes, and legislative action by community governing body.

2. *Activity*–Student research and class presentations. Assign several students to identify the various agencies of the local government whose purpose it is to fulfill community needs, and to identify the relationship between the agency and the local government in terms of control over finances and over appointments of agency officials.

   Have students also identify, for class presentation, recent council legislation which affected the fulfillment of community needs.

   Recommended Resources

   a. The Municipal Clerk should be able to identify for students the various agencies of the local government.
   b. Chamber of Commerce director of borough agencies
   c. League of Women Voters (Borough Handbook)
   d. City Council minutes

Objective Three

1. *Activity*–Class discussion developed by charting. Teacher asks students to define what they feel are the major roles of local government. Teacher then develops chart by asking for examples of how local government fulfills these roles.

   Recommended Resources–Chart should be developed as follows:

Major Role of Local Gov't. (as Defined by Student)	Example Provided by Student
(1) Maintaining law and order (law enforcement)	(1) Council provides a large budget for police force.
(2) Regulating physical appearance and growth of community.	(2) Council passes and reviews zoning law and building ordinances.

2. *Activity*–Guest Speaker–Mayor of town or municipal governing body president will address class on what he or she sees as the role of the local government.

   Recommended Resources

   Recommended questions to ask guest speaker:

   a. What do you see as the major general role of local government?
   b. What are the major specific functions of local government? How have you attempted to fulfill these functions?
   c. What do you consider to be the priorities of the community in terms of how you see the role of local government?
   d. Do you feel that local government has a function concerning long-range needs of the community?

   Have students compile a list of more specific questions to ask the guest speaker.

3. *Activity*—Student research for class presentation. Have several assigned students interview one additional representative of the elected governing body and several non-governing municipal officials (*not* including the Borough Clerk) for their views concerning the role of local government.

   Recommended Resources—The Municipal Clerk's office can provide the list of municipal officials.

4. *Activity*—Guest Speaker—Have Municipal Clerk address the class concerning the role of local government.

   Recommended Questions—Use same questions as in Activity #2 of this Unit.

   Note to Teacher

   The purpose of having the Municipal Clerk come in is to compare view of full-time public official (who probably has greater knowledge of detailed community affairs) with that of elected legislative voting official.

   This is not to convince students that one view is correct (clerk will probably be more concerned with day-to-day role of local government, while Mayor or Council President might be more concerned with long-range planning), but to expose students to the fact that local government has more than one role.

5. *Activity*—Have students do a community research project on the community's perception of the role of local government.

6. *Activity*—Guest speaker—Have county official explain his or her view of local government.

   Recommended Resources—County Administration Building

7. *Activity*—Teacher supplies information to class concerning different role functions of local government.

   Recommended Resources—Functions of local government include:

   a. Service function—providing community services
   b. Physical planning—long-range planning of actual community geography
   c. Fiscal planning function—operation of community financial affairs
   d. Legislative function—governing body enacts legislation.

EVALUATION

Objective One

1. Two students will be asked to list orally the needs of the community which are fulfilled by local government.

2. Two students will be asked to explain orally the methods by which local government fulfills the needs of the community.

3. Four students, chosen at random, will be asked to develop a role-playing skit comparing and contrasting the different views of municipal officials concerning the role of local government.

   One student should assume the role of the Mayor (or City Council person), one the Borough Clerk, one the Tax Assessor, and one the Police Chief.

TEACHER RESOURCES

Listed below are some functions and services that most municipalities perform, and the officials in charge of them. In smaller communities, offices may be part-time or combined.

1. *Police and Fire Protections*

   These services are usually performed by a police chief, police force, fire chief, and paid or volunteer firemen.

2. *Health*

   A Board of Health officer, plumbing inspector.

3. *Sanitation*

   Public works, sanitation and health officials take care of sewage disposal, facilities, street cleaning, garbage collection, inspection, and licensing.

4. *Welfares*

   A local Assistance Board and Director of Welfare.

5. *Education*

   The municipal governing body is responsible for funds in some cases; it appoints a Board of Education and sits on Board of School Estimate. In some communities, school board members are elected.

6. *Planning and Zoning*

   A Planning Board, zoning officer, and building inspector oversee the planned development of the community and enforce zoning laws and construction regulations. A Zoning Board of Adjustments hears appeals and rules on questions pertaining to zoning laws.

7. *Streets and Sidewalks*

   Building and maintaining local streets and sidewalks is the responsibility of the Town Engineer and a Road or Public Works Department.

8. *Traffic and Parking*

   Shared by Town Engineer and Public Works Department.

9. *Financial Operations*

   Tax Assessor (or Board of Assessors) determines value of property to be taxed. Tax Assessor collects bills and receives payment. Treasurer is in charge of all funds.

10. *Other Functions*

    Libraries, parks and recreation, sewer and water utilities.

11. *Additional Municipal Officials*

    Registrar of Vital Statistics, Civil Defense and Disaster Control Director, Municipal Judge, Municipal Attorney. Each municipality must also have a Municipal Clerk.

UNIT TWO

GENERAL CONCEPT:

Understanding the different types of problems faced by local governments.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to differentiate between the three major types of problems faced by local government.

2. Students will be able to list the problems inherent in the structure of local government.

3. Students will be able to list the routine operating problems faced by local government.

4. Students will be able to list the problems of limited authority faced by local government.

ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Objective One

1. *Activity*--Teacher disseminates information either by notes or mimeographed facts sheet.

   Recommended Resources--The three major types of problems facing local governments are:

   a. Problems *inherent* in the structure of local governments; that is, problems which arise because of the very operating structures of government (bureaucratic problems)
   b. *Routine operating problems*; that is, problems confronted by the governing body during the day-by-day activity and council operation of local government
   c. Problems which arise due to the *limited authority* of local government. This occurs when local government does not have the power to solve its problems, because the authority to do so has, by law, been delegated to county and/or state government.

      This is especially true because of the financial dependence of local government upon state and federal aid.

Objective Two

1. *Activity*--Class Discussion. Teacher develops logical discussion concerning problems inherent in the structure of local government. (Teacher must first be sure that students understand what is meant by *inherent* structures.)

   Recommended Resources--Some problems inherent in the structure of local governments include:

   a. A lack of sufficient time for council persons to fulfill community needs adequately--if council persons are to hold down another job and a family (or social) life as well.

   b. The bureaucratic nature of local government might present an excess of 'red tape'--so that citizens

approaching the city with a suggestion or a complaint would receive a "run-around" from local officials and thus lose all desire to communicate with City Hall. In other words, local government structures might make it hard for the average citizen to identify which public official is responsible for community decisions and administration of community agencies.

Recommended Questions for Class Discussion:

a. What conditions in the structure of local government might restrict a council person from doing an excellent job in fulfilling the role of a knowledgeable, sensitive public official?
b. What inherent problems in local government might make it difficult for a community resident to decide where to register a complaint and attain satisfactory action? For example, can you see what difficulty a person might have who wishes to stop the city from removing the hundred-year old oak tree from the front of his lawn for the installation of sewers. Where would he go? Whom could he contact in local government for the *most effective action*?

Objective Three

1. Student research for class presentation and class discussions. Students interview Municipal Clerk who, by this time, should be aware of the class asking him (or her) what the routine problems are in the administration of local government. If the Mayor is a full-time position in your community, then interview this individual too. The same applies to additional major full-time public *administrative* officials (i.e., tax assessor, fire chief, etc.)

Recommended Resources–The Municipal Clerk can provide you with a list of full time *public administrative* officials.

Objective Four

1. *Activity*–Student research for class presentation and class discussion. Students research Council minutes and/or proposal file to identify what proposals of the local governing body presented specific programs for the community and yet were either defeated or passed but not implemented.

The estimated and real costs of the projects should then be checked to identify:

a. How this could would affect the municipal budget, and
b. How much more (in terms of community tax dollars) it would cost the community to implement these projects.

Note to Teachers–Do not develop the concept of reliance upon state or federal aid too much at this point. It should briefly be presented as an alternative to taxing the community, but only in terms that *in order for a community to receive state and/or federal funds*, it must usually obey certain procedures. Thus, some (and often much) of its autonomous control over the community is lost by local government to state and federal financial aid assistance. This is important for the class to understand.

Recommended Resources

a. The Municipal Clerk's office can provide this information.
b. Recommended questions for class discussion:

(1)Do you think they (local governing body) would use extra community money for this project? Why not? Can it legally do so?

(2) What are the alternatives for getting money from outside the community? Does this money come no strings attached?

2. *Activity*—Students present (from research in previous activity) examples of those programs and/or suggested solutions for coping with community problems that just were not under the jurisdiction of the county government. (If none exist in the city records, then the teacher should provide one.)

Recommended Resources

a. Municipal Clerk's office can again provide this information.
b. Sample type of example to be identified by students.

Municipal government wishes to construct a major highway through the municipality; however, even if the municipality has the financial resource to construct one, approval must still be received from the County Freeholders (or Commissioners), who, in this case, usurp some of the local government authority.

EVALUATION

1. Three students, selected at random, will list on the blackboard the three types of problems (one type for each student). Teacher then reads aloud a list of problems and students mark the problem in their category if it belongs there.

2. Students, on a written exam, will be asked to list two problems inherent in the structure of local government.

3. Students, on a written exam, will be asked to list two problems faced in the routine operation of local government.

4. Students, on a written exam, will be asked to list two problems of limited authority faced by local government.

UNIT THREE

GENERAL CONCEPT:

Understanding community planning and the incorporation of long-range goals.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to explain what is meant by "physical" planning and "fiscal" planning.

2. Students will be able to explain the correlation between community problems and long-range planning.

ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Objective One

1. *Activity*—Teacher disseminates information to class, either by notes or mimeographed fact sheets.

   Recommended Resources

   a. Physical Planning—The planning for physical community growth, i.e., zoning codes, industry expansion.
   b. Fiscal Planning—The financial planning of the community, specifically concerned with developing methods of funding projected community growth, i.e., proposing higher tax rates, consolidating community services.

Objective Two

1. *Activity*—Class discussion. Teacher develops discussion concerning the need for long-range planning. However, long-range planning must not be presented as the panacea of community ills. Present-day problems must receive attention; however, long-range planning is too often overlooked, resulting in unnecessary problems. Also include factor of county government when considering long-range community planning.

   Recommended Resources

   Suggested questions for class discussion:

   a. Do you feel long-range planning is necessary in community planning? Why?
   b. Can you identify an example of how a lack of long-range planning could prove disastrous for a community?
   c. Suppose ten years ago you were on the planning committee of your community. Do you see anything existing today for which you might have planned differently? What? Why?
   d. What physical growth do you foresee in your community? What adaptations (new programs, industry, zoning laws) might have to be made to accommodate this growth? From what source will the money come to finance these accommodations?
   e. How does projected county growth affect local government planning.

2. *Activity*—Two selected students will attend three sessions of the Planning Board and report findings back to class.

   Recommended Resources

   a. Schedule of planning sessions is usually available from local newspaper and always from City Clerk's office.
   b. Students should specifically observe the amount of long-range planning (if any) evident at the planning sessions. Students should also record the apparent issues which are priorities for the planning committee at these sessions.

3. *Activity*—Student research for class presentation. Have several students research and explain to class a physical planning map of the community which is at least ten years old. Also have students note the estimated cost of this projection and sources of the necessary funds.

   Then have students compare this planning map to the *actual* growth of the community including financial resources. If no map exists, then research reasons for its non-existence.

   Recommended Resources

   Either City Clerk's office or Council minutes should provide this information. In some cases, however, you may have to consult the County Municipal Building.

4. *Activity*—Student research for class presentation. Students identify what community goals are *on record* and then discuss the reality of implementing these goals, specifically examining what present and long-range problems may exist.

   Recommended Resources

   a. Municipal Clerk may have on record community goals.
   b. City Council minutes.
   c. Mayor of town or City Council President should be consulted for this information.

5. *Activity*—Student contacts County legislators and Planning Board to consider county plans and how these (especially present and projected zoning codes) might affect long-range community planning.

   Recommended Resources—County Administration Office

6. *Activity*—Student research for class presentation. Students research and present for class discussion the most recent community planning map. Class will evaluate long-range and short-range physical goals. How realistic are they? Where will the money (financial resources) come from? Is this realistic? Why? Why not?

   Recommended Resources

   a. Borough Clerk's office
   b. Planning Committee minutes—record files.

7. *Activity*—Guest Speaker—Chairman (preferably); if not possible, then member of Planning Committee

(Commission) will address class concerning the incorporation of long-range and short-range planning into community needs.

Recommended Resources

Students should be able to prepare *specific* questions for guest speaker concerning the planning of your own community. Also include questions concerning County Planning Board influence.

8. *Activity*–Simulated gaming on local government planning. Game should consume *at least* three full class days to reinforce local government planning.

Recommended Resources

a. Urban Dynamics, developed by Urban Dyne.
b. Inner City Planning, developed by Macmillan Company, 1971.

EVALUATION

Objective One

Two students, selected at random, will be asked to explain what is meant by "physical" planning and "fiscal" planning, one definition assigned to each student.

Objective Two

Students, on a written exam, will be asked to develop an essay explaining the correlation between community problems and long-range planning.

UNIT FOUR

GENERAL CONCEPT:

Understanding the function of your own local government.

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to evaluate the operation of their own local government.

ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Activity—"Divided" class project. Class is divided into seven groups, each group selecting a group leader (for consultation with other group leaders). Each group is then assigned one of the following projects:

a. Research and record (for class presentation) a history of the town, and the adoption of the present form of government (identifying the present form).
b. Poll community for attitudes concerning:
   (1)priorities for local government action
   (2)what agencies of local government are most identifiable to the community
   (3)how the community feels about consolidation with area communities (e.g. on pollution or transportation programs).
c. Answer the Community Profile Questionnaire as developed in *Do You Know the ABC's of Your Town's Government?*, available through League of Women Voters of the United States, Washington, D.C.
d. Prepare a 10-year projected physical map of the community.
e. Realistically evaluate zoning plan for community.
f. Develop realistic community goals for the next ten years.
g. Prepare a municipal budget to finance the projected physical growth and community plans.

Students are urged to consult with the other groups (through group leaders) to receive information helpful to their own goals. The Budget preparation group, *must*, of course, consult with the physical planning and community goals groups.

Upon completion of this project, the class should have developed a complete community profile which should be presented to the City Council by the teacher and students.

Recommended Resources

a. Borough Clerk's Office
b. League of Women Voters
c. Local civic groups (Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
d. Newspapers

EVALUATION

Students, by developing a complete community profile, will be asked to evaluate the operation of their own local government.